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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development

Letter dated 17 November 1999 from the representatives of Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instruction from our Governments, we have the honour to transmit to you herewith the document entitled: "Declaration of Guatemala II", signed in Guatemala City on 19 October 1999 by the Central American Presidents (see annex).

We should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 20 (b) and 47.

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Annex

Declaration of Guatemala II

We, the Presidents of the Republics of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua and the First Vice-President of Panama, accompanied by the Vice-President of the Dominican Republic and the Deputy Prime Minister of Belize as observers, have met in Guatemala City, Republic of Guatemala, on 18 and 19 October 1999.

Holding our regular meeting on the threshold of a new millennium and mindful of our commitment to integration, we have discussed priority regional issues which have a profound impact on improving the standard of living of our peoples and on the creation of new development opportunities.

As this century draws to a close, we wish to underscore that we, the peoples of Central America, have brought peace to our countries and made major advances in the consolidation of democracy and governance, the strengthening of civilian government, respect for human rights and the rule of law, reform of the State and the economy, and sustainable development. These transformations have demonstrated to the world the extraordinary determination of Central Americans to live and prosper in a climate of peace and solidarity.

The devastating consequences of the various natural disasters that have affected the region have highlighted its vulnerability and endangered its unique biodiversity, which accounts for 10 per cent of the world's heritage of this resource.

We reaffirm that the implementation of the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America (ALIDES) is fundamental for reducing the vulnerability of Central America and transforming our societies.

As part of this strategy of transformation which entails moving from reconstruction to sustainable development, we shall continue our efforts to integrate the region effectively into the global economy by implementing an agenda for competitiveness and sustainable development, based on upgrading our human resources, on making our institutions more effective and our infrastructure more appropriate and on scientific and technological progress.

We reiterate our firm determination to confront and surmount, together with our peoples, the hardships caused by the various disasters.

We emphasize that, in addition to the direct impact on the physical infrastructure of the health, education, housing and human settlements sectors, one of the principal effects of nature's ravages on the population is their increased vulnerability to disease and the deterioration of nutritional and food security; it is therefore essential to give priority to these aspects on the regional integration agenda.

We acknowledge the solidarity and support of the international cooperation community for the reconstruction and transformation of Central America, which has allowed us to organize unprecedented initiatives in support of the population affected by hurricane Mitch.

We note that the effects of natural disasters are magnified and heightened by external causes, such as global climate change, for which responsibility must be shared at the international level but also differentiated, with the industrialized countries assuming greater obligations, and by internal causes, such as the deterioration, degradation and contamination of natural resources, which we are ready to address and to change, making full use of the mechanisms established in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for reducing vulnerability and promoting adaptability to natural phenomena.

We recognize that the action needed to address the issue of reducing vulnerability to natural disasters and mitigating the damage they cause requires us to draw on accumulated experience in disaster management; it also requires a primarily regional approach and an integrated, intersectoral Central American commitment involving both the public and private sectors and the community in general; lastly, it requires effective coordination at the international, regional, national and local levels, adopting a universally proactive attitude of damage prevention and mitigation which transcends the emergency phase.

We have agreed:

1. To adopt the Strategic Framework for the Reduction of Vulnerability and Disasters in Central America, which forms part of the process of transformation and sustainable development of the region for the next millennium and includes basic guidelines for damage prevention and mitigation measures, as well as action to prepare for and manage emergencies, paying special attention to the most vulnerable groups and sectors of society, particularly as regards poverty and exclusion levels and a gender perspective. The Strategic Framework, which is an integral part of this Declaration, is the master plan for the drafting, updating, adaptation and development of regional plans for the reduction of vulnerability and disasters, for the integrated management and conservation of water resources and for the prevention and control of forest fires;

2. To establish the Central American Five-Year Plan for the Reduction of Vulnerability to and the impact of Disasters, 2000 to 2004, during which our efforts will be focused on transforming our societies and on achieving sustainable development; we trust that the international community will provide supplementary support to help us implement this initiative. We also agree to designate the Coordinating Centre for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America (CEPREDENAC) to coordinate the Five-Year Plan;

3. To instruct the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs and the relevant sectoral councils of ministers and forums, with the support of the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SICA) and in coordination with specialized regional institutions, to comply with and closely monitor the implementation of this Strategic Framework;

4. To instruct the Central American Security Commission, in coordination with the relevant national authorities and with the support of the corresponding regional institutions, to establish as soon as possible transparent, participatory mechanisms for joint action to prevent risks and mitigate disasters in the region;

5. To assign the internal financial resources that these initiatives may require, according to the possibilities of each country; to reiterate the appeal to the international cooperation community to contribute to this effort to decrease vulnerability to disasters in our region; and to instruct the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs, with the help of the General Secretariat of SICA, to coordinate the negotiation of such supplementary international technical and financial resources as may be required in order to implement regional projects, while the respective Government bodies will do the same at the national level;

6. To reiterate the commitment to preserve our seas as a precious asset and to reject their use as a route for the transport of nuclear and toxic waste, since any unforeseen accident could cause a disaster with serious consequences throughout the region;

7. To request the banking inspectorates and financial agencies of the Central American countries to establish, within the framework of their respective regulations, mechanisms to improve their oversight functions in their respective countries, increase their overall level of information exchange and promote the standardization of laws in this area

and the coordinated supervision of financial intermediaries in the region. Furthermore, to request them to promote, in coordination with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), action to develop the capital markets and, in general, the financial systems of Central America;

8. To secure supplementary financial support from the international community, using creative, innovative mechanisms, in order to support the best efforts of the region's creditor countries to grant Nicaragua and, where applicable, Honduras the debt relief due to them within the framework of the Paris Club;

9. To state the importance of having a flexible, effective mechanism for settling trade and investment disputes in an institutional framework. To this end, to instruct the SICA General Secretariat, the Permanent Secretariat of the General Treaty on Central American Economic Integration (SIECA) and the legal advisers of the Ministries for Foreign Affairs and the Economy to propose an institutional formula for approving a trade and investment dispute settlement mechanism like the one agreed on by the Ministers for the Economy of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras;

10. To recognize the importance, for all the countries of the region, of the adoption by the United States Congress of the legislation required to expand the benefits of the Caribbean Basin Initiative. The visit by the Central American Presidents, the President of the Dominican Republic and the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), to Washington, D.C. in September of this year provided an opportunity for dialogue with members of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the Administration. To instruct our Embassies in Washington, D.C. to continue negotiations and to monitor this important legislation;

11. To instruct the Ministers for Foreign Affairs to determine, within three months at most and on the basis of in-depth discussions and a broad process of reflection, the best way to proceed on the elements of the Panama Declaration and the Guidelines for the Rationalization and Modernization of the Regional Institutional Framework of 12 July 1997 that are still pending;

12. To encourage, where applicable, ratification of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; to promote a carbon fixation market so that countries which emit carbon dioxide pay countries which protect their forests; to strengthen the regional dialogue on the implementation of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and to urge the industrialized countries to ratify and implement the Protocol;

13. To express their approval at the full incorporation of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua into the Permanent Mechanism for Consultation and Policy Coordination (Río Group);

14. To acknowledge and welcome the fact that the return of the Panama Canal to the jurisdiction of the Republic of Panama, in compliance with the Panama Canal Treaties, is an event of overwhelming importance for the international community, and that Panama has prepared itself to assume the administration and complete control of the Canal. We also underscore the commitment made by Panama to operate the Canal to serve international trade reliably and promote sustainable development.

We, the Central American Presidents, have decided to hold the twenty-first regular meeting of Presidents in the second half of the year 2000, in Costa Rica.

The Presidents of the Republics of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, the First Vice-President of Panama, the Vice-President of the Dominican Republic and the Deputy Prime Minister of Belize expressed their sincerest appreciation to the people of the

Republic of Guatemala, and to its President and its Government, for the warm welcome and the hospitality extended to them during their stay, which contributed to the success of this significant event.

Signed in Guatemala City, Republic of Guatemala, on 19 October 1999.

(Signed) Miguel Angel **Rodríguez**
President of the Republic of Costa Rica

(Signed) Francisco **Flores Pérez**
President of the Republic of El Salvador

(Signed) Alvaro **Arzú Irigoyen**
President of the Republic of Guatemala

(Signed) Roberto **Flores Bermúdez**
Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
on behalf of the President of the Republic of Honduras

(Signed) Eduardo **Montealegre**
Minister for Foreign Affairs,
on behalf of the President of the Republic of Nicaragua

(Signed) Arturo **Vallarino**
First Vice-President of the Republic of Panama

(Signed) Jaime **David Fernández**
Vice-President of the Dominican Republic

(Signed) John **Briceño**
Deputy Prime Minister of Belize